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ABSTRACT

Drawing from the theoretical background of Schon's concept of the "reflective practitioner," this study compares the ways in which superintendents and school board members view the future and examines their differing perceptions in order to identify possible loci of conflict between them. Board members and superintendents were asked to identify issues that they believed they would face over the next decade and to rank them in terms of relative importance. They were then asked to evaluate the issues as they pertained to themselves, the educational community, their own school district, and U.S. society as a whole. By examining the differences and similarities between the responses of superintendents and board members, potential areas of conflict are identified. For instance, while both superintendents and board members identified school finance as an area of major concern, superintendents placed a higher priority on staff development and planning for the future, while board members stressed such issues as collective bargaining and school community relations. (RJS)

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Practitioners Reflect on the Future: A New Way to Examine The

Knowledge Base Concerning Board-Superintendent Relationships

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Administration, October 29, 1989

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Schon's Journey from Technical Rationality to Reflection-in-Action

Donald Schon purported that the dominant epistemology of practice has been the model of Technical Rationality.

According to the model of Technical Rationality --the view of professional knowledge which has most powerfully shaped both our thinking about the professions and the institutional relations of research, education, and practice --professional activity consists in instrumental problem solving made rigorous by the application of scientific theory and technique. (Schon, 1983, p. 21)

Schon suggests that Technical Rationality is based upon the nineteenth century doctrine of Positivism which constituted a social movement to apply knowledge acquired from scientific and technological endeavors for the benefit of mankind. We are cautioned that Technical Rationality has flaws and limitations such as conflicts in values, the extraordinary complexity of social issues, instability, and uniqueness. Professional practice according to Schon is a process of problem solving which inherently ignores problem setting, the process of defining the problem and then dealing with ends and means. Basic and applied sciences are converging exercises where practice is frequently a divergent process.

"Reflection-in-Action" is the term used by Schon to describe intuitive performance by practitioners based upon their tacitly knowing what is the best, or at least optimal, solution to a problem. The application of knowledge by practitioners is then termed "Knowing-in-Action" which sets aside Technical Rationality and places the application of knowledge in its stead. Andrew Harrison (1978) puts forward the concept that when someone behaves intelligently he "acts his mind". Decision making by school administrators for example could be viewed as being based upon "Informed Intuition" instead of rational thought or as a practicing superintendent said recently, "When we ran out of money and the teachers went on strike, I must admit that the Getzels-Guba Model did not come to mind". Kelrsey and Bates (1984) have expanded the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator research and have noted that those relying on intuition rather than sensation have far different character and temperament types as it pertains to their behavior as managers.

Challenging the basic underpinnings of the epistemology of practice may have significant implications for those studying the behaviors and practices of school administrators. William Glasser (1965) profoundly influenced the practice of psychotherapy when he challenged the efficacy of conventional therapy based upon Freudian precepts. A few years later he translated the fundamental concepts of Reality Therapy into the

Schools Without Failure Program. Other programs have followed that have emphasized positive youth development concepts pioneered by Glasser. Viewing the practice of school administration from Schon's perspective could have similarly far-ranging implications for both the practice of administration and the development of models and paradigms for its study.

The UCEA Program Center for the Study of Superintendents and School Boards

In the fall of 1987 the UCEA Program Center for the Study of Superintendents and Schools Boards was established at the Ohio State University. The rationale for its formation was the belief that superintendents work in a turbulent environment and that boards of education were forced to struggle with troubling ambiguities. Walter Hack (1987) noted that board members frequently encountered " . . . ideological schisms regarding their own roles, functions and relations to superintendents" (p. 1).

The Center set about establishing a research agenda that would involve the study of superintendents, school boards, and their interactions based upon the concept of the reflective practitioner. In order to establish a knowledge base it was decided to conduct research on how superintendents and school board members perceive the future with a view toward identifying

loci of conflict between superintendents and boards. "The concept of nexus -- the area of interaction between boards and executives -- is a predominant theme" (p. 2).

How Do Superintendents and Boards View the Future?

The Center staff needed to learn more about the perceptions held by superintendents and board members pertaining to the issues they were facing over the next ten years. The means by which the research was to be conducted had to be compatible with the staffs' dedication to the concepts inherent in the reflective practitioner. The Delphi Technique was selected as the means to identify issues and obtain assessments of their relative importance. The executive directors of all fifty state associations of superintendents and school boards were asked to identify "doers" in their respective states to participate in the study. Thirty-eight outstanding superintendents and thirty-four school board members representing a like number of states completed all of the Delphi rounds.

The design of the study consisted of asking each participant to identify five issues that would emerge over the next decade that they believed to be important in their role as a superintendent or board member. This constituted round one or the issue generation phase. The Center team consisting of

professors, a superintendent, and graduate assistant selected thirteen issue areas with the highest level of consensus from both groups of participants. In round two the groups were given a listing of their respective thirteen issues and asked to rate them on a 1-10 scale as it pertained to themselves (me), the educational community (profession), their own school district (district), and our society as a whole (society). They were encouraged to comment on up to three issues during subsequent rounds. The mean scores were reported after each round as well as a verbatim listing of all comments.

Summary of Data Collected

Table 1 contains a listing of the issue areas identified by superintendents. Table 2 lists those areas generated by board members. Table 3 displays the issue areas common to both groups in order of the number of issues that were consolidated into one area. Table 4 lists issues specific to superintendents, and Table 5 lists issue areas specific to board members. Appendixes A and B contain the definition of each issue area which will be referred to as issues in the remaining sections.

Table 1: Superintendent Issues, Ordered

Financing Schools
 Equity/Excellence/Accountability
 Technology
 Mission/Curriculum
 Health/Drugs/AIDS
 Students at Risk
 Recruitment of Staff
 Governance/Structure
 Professional Concerns
 Planning for the Future
 Staff Development
 Changing Demographics
 Federal/State/Courts Encroachment

Table 2: School Board Issues, Ordered

Financing Schools
 Mission/Curriculum
 Students at Risk
 Changing Demographics
 Governance/Structure
 Quality in Teaching and Administration
 Collective Bargaining
 Recruitment of Staff
 Health/Drugs/AIDS
 Federal/State/Courts Encroachment
 Technology
 School Board Membership
 School Community Relations

Table 3: Issues Common to Both Panels

Financing Schools
 Mission/Curriculum
 Students at Risk
 Changing Demographics
 Governance/Structure
 Recruitment of Staff
 Health/Drugs/AIDS
 Technology
 Federal/State/Courts Encroachment

Table 4: Issues Specific to Superintendents

Equity/Excellence/Accountability
 Professional Concerns
 Planning for the Future
 Staff Development

Table 5: Issues Specific to School Board Members

Quality in Teaching and Administration
 Collective Bargaining
 School Community Relations
 School Board Membership

School finance has long been at the top of the list of concerns of superintendents and school board members: e.g. the Gallup Poll. School funding issues were noted more often by members of both groups than any other issue. Mission and curriculum issues were near the top of both lists as were the issues related to "Students at Risk". Fewer concerns were raised about "Governance/Structure" and "Recruitment of Staff" but they were in roughly the same order. Board members cited

"Changing Demographics" more often than superintendents. Relative to other issues superintendents were far more concerned about technology issues than board members and to some extent more troubled by "Health/Drugs/AIDS" issues.

The Center staff was quite interested in determining what issues were of little or no importance to school board members but important to superintendents; and conversely, what issues were important to school board members but of little interest to superintendents. The superintendents were concerned about "Equity/Excellence/Accountability" matters, the status of the educational profession, helping staff members renew themselves and grow professionally, and long range or strategic planning. Board members were quite concerned about the quality of teachers and administrators but instead of relating this to professional growth were more interested in the improvement of preparation programs, alternative certification and evaluation (accountability).

It was anticipated that superintendents and school board members would have a number of divergent perceptions that could be difficult to explain. Collective bargaining for example has been a part of education for a rather short period. Board members indicated great disdain for the process, but few superintendents expressed any feelings about the process even

though Wilson (1980) reported that it was a major factor in determining the longevity of the superintendents in his studies. Interestingly, in an earlier study Wilson (1979) found that successful superintendents perceived public relations to be a major function of their job, but it was rarely mentioned by the superintendents in this study. Board members stated that obtaining the support and understanding of the community was a problem, particularly with respect to being more accountable to their constituents. Finding committed, competent board members was frequently mentioned by board members with some reporting that the caliber of those choosing to serve was declining. Superintendents in this study did not list this as concern with any significant frequency. Finally, the perceived loss of local control and the shifting of power to federal and state governments and the courts was very disturbing to board members but rarely listed by superintendents.

Internal Variance - School Board Members

As noted earlier both groups were asked to rate thirteen issues that they generated in round 1 on a one to ten scale. Each issue was rated with respect to how they perceived its effect on them personally, their community, their own district, and society as a whole. How their responses ranged over these four perspectives was called "internal variance". The mean

ratings of these issues ranged from 4.9 to 8.06. Collective bargaining varied the most with the importance to their own district being viewed as far less important than its impact on the communities they served. Governance/structure issues varied almost as much as collective bargaining, again with the most impact seen as it affected the community and the least concern about how it might impact the district. Health issues including drugs and AIDS were viewed to be of much greater concern to society than them personally.

In contrast to the wide variance of some of the mean ratings by board members some issues were rated at very similar levels of importance, the scoring being so close that one could conclude that there were virtually no significant differences as to how they viewed these issues with respect to themselves, their districts, the education profession and society as a whole. Their concerns about school community relations were highly rated (nearly as high as school finance and quality of board members). The financing of the schools received the highest ratings and varied only slightly more than school community relations. Concerns about at-risk students and technology received significantly lower mean ratings but were quite consistent across the four categories.

Internal Variance - Superintendents

Mean rankings concerning the status of teachers and administrators varied most widely among superintendents in the study. They perceived that it was far more important to the educational profession than it was to society. Staff development was seen as being far less important to society than to themselves. Planning for the future was a very important personal concern but perceived to be of far less concern to society. On the other hand, health issues varied the least across the four categories. Equity/excellence issues barely varied one ranking point followed by recruitment of teaching staff issues. The encroachment of the federal and state governments and the courts vis-a-vis local control of the schools received very low but highly consistent scores.

External Variance - School Boards and Superintendents

Tables 6-9 array the issue areas in order from highest to lowest ratings given by school board members and superintendents. Table 6 contains the issues pertaining to their value to "me", Table 7 pertains to the value ascribed to the educational profession, Table 8 relates the ratings to the value to the participants' school districts, and Table 9 lists the

ratings in order of their perceived value to the society as a whole.

Table 6: Board vs. Superintendents 'Me'

Board, Ordered	Superintendents., Ordered
School Board Membership	Financing Schools
Financing Schools	Plan for Future
School Community Relations	Recruit Staff
Quality Teachers/Administrators	Staff Development
Recruit Staff	Mission/Curriculum
Mission/Curriculum	Equity/Excellence
Demographics	Students At Risk
Fed/State/Courts Encroachment	Health/Drugs/AIDS
Students At Risk	Technology
Technology	Demographics
Health/Drugs/AIDS	Gov/Structure
Gov/Structure	Prof Concerns
Collective Bargaining	Fed/State/Courts Encroachment

Table 7: Board Vs. Superintendents 'Profession'

Board, Ordered	Superintendents, Ordered
Financing Schools	Financing Schools
Recruit Staff	Recruit Staff
School Board Membership	Staff Development
Quality Teachers/Administrators	Equity/Excellence
School Community Relations	Students At Risk
Students At Risk	Health/Drugs/AIDS
Fed/State/Courts Encroachment	Mission/Curriculum
Technology	Prof Concerns
Mission/Curriculum	Technology
Health/Drugs/AIDS	Plan for Future
Demographics	Fed/State/Courts Encroachment
Collective Bargaining	Demographics
Gov/Structure	Gov/Structure

Table 8: Board Vs. Superintendents 'District'

Board, Ordered	Superintendents, Ordered
Financing Schools	Financing Schools
School Community Relations	Health/Drugs/AIDS
School Board Membership	Recruit Staff
Recruit Staff	Plan for Future
Students At Risk	Equity/Excellence
Quality Teachers/Administrators	Mission/Curriculum
Health/Drugs/AIDS	Technology
Technology	Students At Risk
Mission/Curriculum	Staff Development
Fed/State/Courts Encroachment	Fed/State/Courts Encroachment
Demographics	Demographics
Gov/Structure	Prof Concerns
Collective Bargaining	Gov/Structure

Table 9: Board Vs. Superintendents 'Society'

Board, Ordered	Superintendents, Ordered
Health/Drugs/AIDS	Health/Drugs/AIDS
Students At Risk	Equity/Excellence
Financing Schools	Recruitment of Staff
Recruit Staff	Financing Schools
Technology	Technology
Demographics	Students At Risk
Mission/Curriculum	Mission/Curriculum
Quality Teachers/Administrators	Plan for Future
School Board Membership	Demographics
School Community Relations	Staff Development
Fed/State/Courts Encroachment	Fed/State/Courts Encroachment
Gov/Structure	Prof Concerns
Collective Bargaining	Gov/Structure

The financing of schools remained at the top of all of the lists except when respondents were asked about its importance to the society as a whole where health, students at risk, and

equity/excellence issues came to the fore. Membership on school boards remained at the top of board members rankings except for its importance to society. This issue was not listed by enough superintendents to warrant placement in round 2 (request for rating of top issues). Staffing concerns (recruitment, staff development, quality of teachers/administrators) were ranked rather consistently in the upper half of the rankings by both groups.

Mission/Curriculum issues were ranked relatively the same across the four categories. The perception of the usurping of local governance (Federal/State/Courts Encroachment) varied in perceived importance widely between the two groups (Table 6). This issue was somewhat important to board members personally but received the lowest ranking in this category by superintendents. When asked to value this issue as it pertains to the educational profession, again board members felt it was more important. It should be noted that collective bargaining issues received consistently low rankings by board members and was seldom mentioned by superintendents in round 1 (issue generation). Superintendents consistently rated the "Health/Drugs/AIDS" issues to be more important to themselves, the profession, and their district than did board members. Both groups rated it as the most important issue for the society as a whole.

REFLECTIONS, PERCEPTIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

An ongoing interest of the Center is the identification of potential conflict or "collision points" between superintendents and board members. Points of potential friction could arise out of issues that are very important to both parties and to those where their relative importance varies significantly. Superintendents and school board members both rated the financing of schools as the number one concern for the coming decade. Larry Cuban (1985) asserts that a major point of conflict between these two parties is the "constant quest for adequate funds to underwrite the many complex goals that schools . . . are expected to achieve" (p. 28). Seeking and allocating funds to achieve goals takes us to the other issue that superintendents and board members feel is extremely important, "Mission/Curriculum". It could be predicted that conflicts over these two areas will intensify in the 1990s if for no other reason than the importance both groups placed upon them.

Alvey and Underwood (1985) reported that boards wanted a larger share of the authority in their respective school districts and that they disagreed with superintendents most frequently on personnel issues. Superintendents in this study were concerned about equity, the educational profession, and staff development. These issues were not important to board members except for teacher quality, accountability, and alternative certification. When there

Is such a distinct difference in perspective and when one of the parties seeks more power conflicts could arise frequently.

Cunningham and Hentges (1982) conducted a comprehensive study of American school superintendents which can provide some additional perspective to the data collected in this study. Superintendents were asked to identify what they thought their boards of education expected from them. Human relations was at the top of the list followed by knowledge of finance, internal management, public relations skills, planning, and curriculum development (p. 79). Issues listed in Tables 1 and 2 also list finance and curriculum. Superintendents were also asked to identify what problems they felt board members faced. School community relations was second only to financial matters. Based on this study and the data presented in this paper it could be predicted that the superintendents of the 1990s will be selected and evaluated on their ability to develop and maintain a good public relations program. Why then did the superintendents in this study place so little importance in this issue area? One explanation could be that "it goes with the territory" and is so ingrained in the position that listing it as an emerging issue did not occur to superintendents. If, however, superintendents do not feel that public relations is an important issue in the 1990s, one could predict the potential for conflict with their boards.

A rather surprising finding in this study was that board members were very concerned about the recruitment and training of committed, competent board members, but the superintendents were not. It may be that superintendents are satisfied with their boards or they may feel that the recruitment of board members is beyond the scope of their responsibilities. Wilson (1980) concluded that unsuccessful superintendents paid too little attention to the composition of their boards when they were employed and that many successful superintendents were quite active in the recruitment and training of board members.

Future Research

Schon's view of the reflective practitioner is one of dealing with problem setting as well as problem solving. Future research by the Center will involve the use of groups of practitioners analyzing the data derived from this research as well as other studies that have examined the role of the superintendents and their relationships to boards of education and other constituent groups. A group of practicing superintendents and university professors in northwest Ohio began meeting last year with a view toward examining the varied challenges, problems, and concerns of the superintendency. Schon's conceptualization of the reflective practitioner has formed the framework for the structure of the meetings. The Center has also authorized an additional study

similar to this one which will involve representatives from each of the UCEA member institutions. Data gathered may provide new insights into the practice of school administration and the reform of administrator preparation programs.

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— Superintendent Delphi: —
Issue Descriptors

SUPERINTENDENT ISSUES

Federal, State and Court Encroachment: Narrowing of local control through the imposition of federal state and court action.

Equity/Excellence/Accountability: Reacting to the issues and concerns surrounding equity, opportunity, quality and accountability.

Technology: Providing expanded opportunities with the assistance of technological systems (computer, interactive video, etc.) and coping with rapid change in the field.

Mission/Curriculum: Responding to the momentum generated internally and externally to examine afresh the mission of public education and the curriculum essential to that mission.

Health/Drugs/AIDS: Coping with threats to the physical and emotional well-being of children and youth.

Students at Risk: Defining and designing programs and services necessary to meet the educational needs of students at risk in terms of academic, physical, medical, psychological and social aspects.

Recruitment of Staff: Attracting the "best and the brightest" into teaching and administration and reducing barriers (certification, low pay, esteem), and promoting incentives.

Governance/Structure: Responding to ideas, proposals and forces directed toward altering the traditional structure and authority systems for public education.

Professional Concerns: Responding to concerns (salaries, status, roles) that are prominent among teachers and administrators.

Financing Schools: Designing a system to generate and distribute revenue to school systems in an efficient, adequate, and equitable manner in an environment marked by intensifying competition for scarce resources.

Planning for the Future: Developing of strategic planning processes to cope with change and effectively confront our future needs into the next century.

Staff Development: Providing opportunities for staff growth, retraining, and renewal which could result in program development, and more motivated staff.

Changing Demographics: Coping with demographic changes ("haves and have nots," aging, minorities), both current and projected.

School Board Issue Descriptors

ISSUES

School Community Relations: Achieving better public understanding of and support for public schools expanding and diversifying participation, and responding to demands for accountability.

Quality in Teaching and Administration: Improving the quality of current and aspiring teacher and administrators through changes in preparation programs, the enhancement of professionalism, the provision of accountability, and the exploration of alternative avenues for certification.

Health, Drugs, AIDS: Coping with threats to the physical and emotional well-being of children and youth.

Federal, State, and Court Encroachment: Narrowing of local control through the imposition of federal, state and court actions.

Students at Risk: Defining and designing programs and services necessary to meet the educational needs of students at risk in terms of academic, physical, medical, psychological and social aspects.

Mission/Curriculum: Responding to the momentum generated internally and externally to examine afresh the mission of public education and the curriculum essential to that mission.

Governance/Structure: Responding to the ideas, proposals, and forces directed toward altering the traditional structure and authority systems for public education.

Financing Schools: Designing a system to generate and distribute revenue to school systems in an efficient, adequate, and equitable manner in an environment marked by intensifying competition for scarce resources.

Technology: Providing expanded opportunities with the assistance of technological systems (computer, interactive video, etc.) and coping with rapid change in the field.

Changing Demographics: Coping with demographic changes ("haves and have nots," aging, minorities), both current and projected.

School Board Membership: The need for the recruitment of committed, competent community members to seek board election/appointment and obtain the training needed for good boardmanship.

Recruitment of Staff: Attracting the "best and the brightest" into teaching and administration and reducing barriers (certification, low pay, esteem), and promoting incentives.

Collective Bargaining/Teacher Unions: Addressing the issues surrounding teacher-board collective bargaining and their impact on society.

Unclassified responses: Those responses that did not fit easily into any of the derived categories.